



**TESTIMONY OF THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE DIVISION OF RYASAP
FOR THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

FEBRUARY 24, 2014

**IN SUPPORT OF HB 6834: AN ACT CONCERNING COLLABORATION BETWEEN
BOARDS OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS; AND
HB 6837: AN ACT ENCOURAGING A GRADUATED RESPONSE MODEL FOR
STUDENT DISCIPLINE**

For the past seven years, we have worked with various Connecticut Juvenile Courts and Schools to mediate student-student and occasionally student-staff conflicts. Early on, nearly all of our work came from court referrals. We quickly noticed that the vast majority of the cases referred for mediation originated from school-based interactions that led to arrests. We thought, why not mediate in schools rather than in court? We then began reaching out to schools to promote restorative practices over arrests whenever possible.

We have found through our work and through participation in Local Implementation Service Teams that when it comes to school discipline, there is significant disparity between school districts and even within a given district. Some schools have mediation programs they employ to resolve many student-student conflicts, such as rumors and boy/girl relationships. Some refer students to diversionary programs, such as Juvenile Review Boards. Another has a School Resource Officer who invites students to attend early morning judo class with him as an alternative to suspension. Still others suspend students anytime there is a physical altercation. Sometimes kids behaving in the same manner have very different outcomes, depending on what school they attend, or even which Assistant Principal or School Resource Officer (SRO) is assigned to a particular grade within a school.

We strongly support the idea of requiring Memoranda of Agreement between police and schools and that such MOAs include a graduated response model for school discipline. This will increase the mutual understanding amongst SROs, school staff, students and parents of the disciplinary actions that will be considered for various misbehaviors. In turn, students will be treated more fairly and SROs will have a clearer guide for what is their role in school discipline.

In order to discover and improve best school disciplinary practices, we also support the collection and publication of data, as set forth in Section 2 of HB 6834 (“school race, ethnicity, gender, age, students with disabilities and type of offense for which the school-based arrests were made and the number of arrests made annually at each school within the school district.”)

RYASAP Programs include:

- Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance
- Health Promotion & Wellness
- Parent Leadership Training Institute
- Public Allies Connecticut
- Restorative Justice
- Safe Asleep: Smoke Alarm Installation
- YouthINC

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Additionally, we encourage the disaggregation of arrest data by free or reduced price lunch status, and English Language Learner Status.

We hope the final version of the legislation will recognize what we all know - that students are in the formative stage of their lives. They are testing out a range of behaviors. We adults should be careful to avoid unnecessarily punitive responses to behavior that presents no real threat of danger to students or staff. Students should be held accountable for misbehavior and where damage has been caused by their behavior, students should repair that harm, but arrest does not lead to such restoration for those harmed nor for those who caused the harm. Each incident requiring disciplinary response merits careful, thoughtful consideration of the appropriate steps to address any harm done within the boundaries of a carefully constructed graduated response model.

As Fred Rogers testified to the US Senate in 1969, “One of the first things that a child learns in a healthy family is trust.” With a level playing field regardless of age, race, or socio-economic status, trust in schools can be built as well. With a Mr. Rogers’-like “neighborhood expression of care every day to each child”, CT school children will thrive.

Thank you.

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